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East Timor Action Alert

RECENT EVENTS: The resignation of Indonesian President Suharto has created the best chance for a just solution to the tragedy in East Timor since Indonesian forces invaded the territory in 1975. Because of the recent political changes in Jakarta, Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, has stressed that now is the time to make concerted efforts to remedy the grim situation in East Timor. Just a year ago, Bishop Belo, addressing the Kansas City meeting of the NCCB/USCC, urged greater advocacy from this country on behalf of East Timor; he has renewed that request with renewed urgency now.

USCC POSITION: The most recent expression on the issues was a June 1998 letter from Archbishop McCarrick, Chairman of the Committee on International Policy to Secretary of State Albright, calling for U.S. diplomatic assistance to support the right of the East Timorese to freely choose their own future in accordance with United Nations resolutions. The archbishop also wrote at that time to Bishop Belo, underscoring USCC support for his efforts. In his New Year's address to the diplomatic corps at the Vatican, Pope John Paul II spoke of the plight of the "people of East Timor, and in particular the sons and daughters of the Church there, still awaiting more peaceful conditions in order to be able to look to the furture with greater confidence."

ACTION REQUESTED: Several Members of Congress have taken the lead in urging the President to use his leverage with Indonesia to help bring about major changes in policy on East Timor. At the least, they ask that the United States bring its enormous influence to bear in helping to meet Bishop Belo's plea that the number of Indonesian troops in East Timor be greatly reduced, that political prisoners be released, that intimidation, violence and torture be ended, and that a just and equitable solution to the 22-year old conflict be vigorous pursued.

Please contact your Senators and Representative, asking them to support such efforts at this crucial juncture. Ask your Representative to sign-on to the letters to President Clinton and President Habibie originated by Representatives Tony Hall, Frank Wolf, Nita Lowey, Chris Smith, Tom Lantos, John Edward Porter, Patrick Kennedy, Joseph Pitts and Barney Frank. Ask your Senators to consider joining Sen. Russ Finegold's similar initiative. Consider sending all three a letter similar to the draft on the reverse of this Action Alert.

This is really a critical time for East Timor. Thanks for doing whatever you can.

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